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ABSTRACT

At Florida Junior College at Jacksonville, public speaking instructors employ Jerome S. Bruner's four factors of learning--predisposition to learn, structure of knowledge, sequence, and reinforcement--to plan an effective learning program for students with diverse academic backgrounds and goals. Specifically, six learning units, tailored to both two- and four-year students, provide practical applications of Bruner's four factors: (1) the "icebreaker" to satisfy the predisposition to learn, (2) the interview to focus on structure, (3) the speech critique to demonstrate structure, (4) parliamentary procedure to illustrate the sequence of material, (5) the introduction assignment to clarify the use of sequence, and (6) oral presentations and persuasive techniques to build skills through reinforcement. (JL)

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Supplying Community College Needs in Basic Speech Courses at Florida Junior College at Jacksonville, Florida

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Florida Junior College has an open door policy which allows students from diverse academic backgrounds to enter its educational programs. One of the required courses for a majority of the programs is Fundamentals of Public Speaking. Thus, a Public Speaking instructor encounters a serious dilemma--how to satisfy the four year degree seeking student (who will complete at a four-year school) and the terminal degree student (who employs direct applications of materials in the work environment) by effectively achieving balance between theory and practical application. This goal can be achieved through carefully executed learning programs that: (1) employ Bruner's four factors of learning and (2) allow students to learn theoretical concepts through practical applications. In this presentation, specific examples of exercises and oral assignments fulfilling the objectives for all students simultaneously are offered.

Speech instructors often encounter the lack of a body of empirically proven principles of instructional theory. Further, the most useful instructional theory by nature is primarily prescriptive; its purpose is to organize material in an orderly manner for effective teaching and learning. Jerome S. Bruner (1960), in his book The Process of Education, proposes such a theory of instruction offering four comprehensive factors:

(1) Predisposition to learn

(2) Structure of knowledge

(3) Sequence

(4) Reinforcement

The first factor, a predisposition to learn, maintains that a student needs to desire and be open to learning, but that most basic ideas can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest way to any person at any stage of development. Tailoring the learning experience to the student's intellectual capacity and needs makes it possible for that student to aspire to complete the three processes involved in the act of learning. The three basic processes of learning are: (1) acquisition, understanding contrary information or replacing or refining previous knowledge; (2) transformation, manipulating knowledge to fit new tasks; and (3) evaluation to be sure the way information is manipulated is appropriate and adequate. For example, when teaching the skills involved in interviews, as discussed in this paper, to students with little or no interview experience, role playing activities stimulate thinking, while simulating possible situations.

Bruner's second factor, structure, also plays a key role in the act of learning. By structuring the subject content in an orderly fashion, an instructor allows the students to advance more easily when transferring principles and attitudes

to other subject ideas; structure enables the student to understand accurately how things are related. This objective is met by three possible methods of critiquing speeches.

The third factor, sequence of the material, introduces the student to communication in the order of significance. Progressively complex notions are assimilated quickly when materials are arranged properly. The introduction and parliamentary procedure assignments employ sequence.

The fourth factor, reinforcement, implies students learn through repetition. Any assignments designed to reinforce a principle or idea need to challenge the students and broaden their knowledge. Oral presentational skills and persuasive techniques presented in this paper are especially enhanced by using reinforcement.

A community college instructor employs all four factors when planning an effective learning program for students with diverse academic and economic backgrounds. For Bruner (1972), "Good teaching that emphasizes the structure of a subject is even more valuable for the less able student than for the gifted one, for it is the former rather than the latter who is most easily thrown off track by poor teaching."[2] By implementing each of Bruner's four factors, a Fundamentals of Public Speaking instructor attempts to answer the needs of the students from diverse backgrounds.

The diversity of the students is reflected in a simple survey compiled from two fundamental speech classes during a recent summer term. Of thirty-nine enrollees in these classes, there were fifteen females and twenty-four males whose average age was twenty-three. Of the thirty-nine, twenty-eight were seeking four year degrees, nine two year degrees, and two were undecided.

To specifically satisfy the needs of all students from the various levels while employing Bruner's four factors, six learning units that demonstrate theoretical concepts are described in this paper and analyzed briefly for each level (two year/four year):

(1) The "icebreaker" to satisfy the predisposition to learn

(2) The interview to focus on structure

(3) The speech critique to demonstrate structure

(4) Parliamentary procedure to illustrate the sequence of material

(5) The introduction assignment to clarify the use of sequence

(6) Oral presentations and persuasive techniques to build skills through reinforcement.

Since speaking in public tops the list of fears for many adults in the United States (Davidson, 1982),[3] a competent instructor focuses special attention on creating an atmosphere

where students can learn and perform. This focus encourages the predisposition to learn. An instructor needs to alleviate fear, minimize frustration, and build up confidence within each student before any lengthy performance is required. The icebreaker (any exercise that serves to lessen formality or break down reserve [Guralnik, 1972] provides one method to achieve this goal for community college students.[4]

During the orientation to the basic course, the instructor introduces himself to illustrate the icebreaker exercises. To lessen student nervousness for this exercise, an instructor assures students that while speaking in public requires skill and knowledge, the required practice and information will be part of the class. The instructor also suggests each student possesses unique and interesting experiences and will not lack worthwhile material for the presentation. For the icebreaker, students are asked to stand at the front of the class, state their names, educational background, factors of family life, significant quirks, hobbies and educational objectives.

During the teacher's presentation she employs the gamit of emotions to enhance the message; she does not mention this requirement orally. Terminal degree students focus on name, age, address, high school attended, and courses being taken. Their interpretation of the assignment is often incomplete and lacks the use of any expression. The four year student adds long range goals and at least one distinguishing

characteristic employing emotional qualities to successfully fulfill the purpose of the exercise.

Another unit of learning and skill building (focusing on structure) is one on interviews, with students acting as interviewer and interviewee. Students initially learn why and how interview skills, whether for a job, a loan application or other daily situations, are important. Next, students participate in impromptu role-playing exercises, each of which is followed by a brief discussion of the students' performance and principles and practical suggestions for the situation. Finally, students plan a professionally-oriented interview involving a rewarding or degrading situation. Students learn how their own backgrounds and personalities affect communication during an interview by observing other role-play situations. The terminal degree students generally prefer to present planned and impromptu experiences that relate to their immediate employment and particularly job-related problems. However, it can be observed that students pursuing the four-year degree usually render the assignment with a greater depth of character, originality, and creativity than two-year students.

Also supporting structure are three methods of clarifying the process of critiques--two for students and one for instructors. An instructor explains the evaluation sheet by reviewing the requirements for a high quality speech before it is performed by the students, and simultaneously demonstrates

how other students can help a classmate improve. Every student is expected to critique a student performance orally --at the conclusion of a speech--with at least one constructive comment for improvement and one complimentary comment.

An instructor critiques speeches, by presenting oral feedback after a speech that is reinforced by a written evaluation form later. After all speeches are presented, the instructor also summarizes where students improved and points out some common problems that many class members need to improve.

For the third method of critiquing, student assignments are videotaped. After the class, the tapes are kept at the library and students view the videotapes when it is convenient and as often as they desire on an individual basis. Terminal degree seeking students demand practical information needed to improve the next speech and, beyond that, their on-the-job communication. These students are able to apply principles to other areas, but this application seems less significant to them momentarily. Students improve quickly when they see themselves and when other students reinforce the teacher's comments. But each student chooses a different place to begin the improvement process.

For the four-year degree seeking students, the instructor indicates specific skills for improvement while indicating on the written form how the lack of these skills affects other

areas of communication such as English composition. These students then improve written and oral messages quickly. It should be noted that a speech instructor does not continuously or pointedly declare the differences in expectations and qualities between the students; instead the different needs are usually satisfied through personal contact and written critiques.

Bruner's third factor, sequence, influences the instruction of parliamentary procedure. At a point in the term when working together is necessary for group requirements such as organization, logic and reason, cooperation and persuasive techniques, parliamentary procedure becomes useful.

> "Regardless of occupation or social statue, more than 9,000 hours of your life--or roughly one year --will be spent in meetings (Verderber, 1982)."

Not only should every member of our society be familiar with the democratic process, but also each member often employs a form of parliamentary procedure in organizational work. Using parliamentary procedure simplifies the organization process of a group and equal opportunity for all sides to be heard by stressing the order of one thing at a time, majority rule, minority voice, debate propositions and non-obstruction of action.

Since in many groups, parliamentary procedure is used to control the communication process, the introduction of

parliamentary procedure study is accomplished by the instructor's brief explanation of some general guidelines for use in meetings governed by Robert's Rules of Order or similar systems.

Students then are invited to participate in the process by serving as the various officers of an organization. For example, the class is called to order by a student role-playing the president, a secretary takes roll and reads minutes, etc. Chairmen give reports and under old and new business motions are made to carry out classroom study for that day.

An appreciation of imposed order as it simplifies group communication is later extended to group discussion study, a segment also taught in this course. The terminal degree student, generally a novice to the entire process, shows some interest in the novelty of the assignment and in role-playing, but does not accept it as a necessity for the future. The four-year student, even if a novice, accepts the role-playing as practice for future use.

The sequence of an assignment is also used when discussing one method of teaching the parts of a speech. Students present only an introduction to a speech before the body of that speech or its conclusion to develop an understanding of the basic structure and elements of the delivery of a speech. To complete the sequence at a more complex level, students later present the entire speech. Both groups, the four-year degree

seeking and terminal degree students, benefit from the assignment since they improve and polish their original presentation before offering the entire speech.

An instructor who uses Bruner's third factor, sequence, properly, discovers a significant teaching technique advantage that at the same time creates a need for better organization. The advantage occurs because students relate better to new principles, terms, and philosophies when a direct example precedes the new information. When students present the introduction separately first or use parliamentary procedure for daily classroom business, the appropriate processes, principles and terms become more meaningful.

While the students learn more efficiently, the instructor must keep track of what topics are covered. Students dislike classes where a teacher is redundant and mechanical. Therefore, an instructor, while never presenting materials in the exact manner every term, must be fully aware of when materials have been discussed.

Oral reading skills deserve attention in the Fundamentals of Public Speaking course and rely on Bruner's fourth factor, reinforcement. Television presentations where speechmakers read from teleprompters demand the use of this skill for a high quality performance that enhances credibility. The first short selection, the Chapter Report, involves oral reporting. Each student synthesizes material from a chapter, concentrating

on assembling, arranging, and interpreting the information into a coherent, unbiased report which is presented orally to the class. The skills learned are often employed in business or government, as the terminal degree and four-year degree seeking students recognize readily. Additionally students prepare for the group discussion by conducting a question and answer period after the presentation (another use of reinforcement by the instructor).

In an effort to distinguish between oral reporting and oral reading, and in an attempt to include interpretation as a brief segment of the course, students are asked to read a short selection and explain its significance. Again, the instructor demonstrates the assignment. A discussion follows emphasizing the use of pauses, vocal variety, appropriate eye contact, posture, and familiarity with the material.

To sharpen these oral skills, a longer, more involved assignment is made entitled "Let's Hear It Again." Students are asked to present a published speech within a time limit. Students read and interpret the speech they have chosen and thereby reinforce their use of pauses, appropriate eye contact, posture, and especially vocal nuances. To perform well students must: (1) understand the general purpose of the speech; (2) comprehend the parts (introduction, body and conclusion) and their purpose; (3) know the methods of cutting materials to fit the time allowed; and (4) sharpen oral reading skills used in previous assignments.

Terminal degree students tend to choose well known speeches that represent practical notions and stem from individuals from a background similar to their own. Four-year degree seeking students tend to select lesser known speeches that are generally more philosophical in nature. Both groups say they enjoy this assignment because they can understand the purpose and parts of someone else's speech, other than the instructor's offerings, before writing one of their own.

Persuasive techniques benefit students more when there is ample opportunity to practice these methods and principles using the reinforcement aspect. Students in the FJC Fundamentals of Public Speaking course begin with a group discussion. For the assignment, each student participates on stage in a symposium or panel discussion and in the audience as a critical listener. The use of parliamentary procedure insures order, thereby reinforcing the previous use in class. Persuasive techniques are applied formally in this assignment for the first time in the course.

Students present a persuasive speech as a final presentation. Persuasive techniques used in the group are now applied on an individual basis; each student demonstrates his own capabilities and understanding of the persuasion process. Students meet the following criteria: (1) employ deductive or inductive logic and sound reasoning within the speech;

(2) meet the time limit; (3) use properly the principles of organization (introduction, body, conclusion); and (4) state clearly in an ethical way the purpose of the speech. In the persuasive speech all the skills learned in previous assignments are employed. Additionally logic and persuasive techniques become significant.

For persuasive speeches, terminal degree students again pick topics related to their jobs or experience. They are generally not capable of delineating an example of induction or deduction, rather the emphasis is on the topic. Four-year degree seeking students prefer to point out the structures and principles of logic and reasoning employed through verbal transitions as a means of justifying and summarizing these methods.

While Bruner's four factors, as discussed in this paper, are designed to encourage excellence in teaching, this well known theorist maintains that an instructor's personality, philosophy and insight also affect the students. The ultimate goal of good instruction at the community college level, however, remains the same: to make sure all students receive the best learning experience possible. With students entering the community college with varied academic goals and levels, a learning experience that can simultaneously benefit all students becomes increasingly complex yet challenging. The methods in

this paper offer some solutions to enhance the teaching and learning process for the Fundamentals of Public Speaking course at the community college level.

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